

# **BUCK ISLAND REEF NATIONAL MONUMENT**

## **Park History**

Buck Island was designated a “park” or protected area by the Municipal Government of St. Croix in 1948, and inappropriate use of the island for goat grazing was stopped. In 1961, the Virgin Islands Legislature passed a bill giving up use of the island and its surrounding waters so that the federal government could make it part of the National Park System. President John F. Kennedy proclaimed Buck Island Reef National Monument (consisting of approximately 180 acres land and 700 acres water) in December, 1961 to protect and preserve “one of the finest marine gardens in the Caribbean Sea” from “despoliation and commercial exploitation.” Kennedy’s proclamation recognized Buck Island as an “area of outstanding scientific, aesthetic, and educational importance...” Its submerged lands were enlarged by 30 acres by President Gerald R. Ford in 1975. The U.S. Coral Reef Initiative of 1998 provided justification for President William J. Clinton to expand Buck Island Reef’s boundaries by 18,135 acres in January, 2001. Buck Island Reef National Monument’s current area totals 19,045 land and water acres.

## **Resource Significance**

Buck Island Reef National Monument is most notable for its coral reef ecosystem and the small tropical island that it encircles. Its biological diversity and complexity affords outstanding opportunities for approved recreational activities, public education, and scientific research. The Monument is host to several Threatened and Endangered species, and contains significant evidence of human use on land and in the water over thousands of years.

## **Park Mission**

The National Park Service is tasked with caring for, managing, and protecting the resources within the boundaries of the Monument by:

- \* protecting and enhancing critical coral reef, seagrass, and shelf edge habitats
- \* protecting and enhancing habitat for Threatened and Endangered species
- \* facilitating the regeneration of fisheries resources through the enhancement of fish nurseries
- \* protecting terrestrial and submerged cultural resources

## **Operational Factors**

Buck Island Reef National Monument is part of the Southeast Region of the NPS, with a regional office in Atlanta, Georgia. This region oversees park areas in the southern U.S., Puerto Rico, and the U.S. Virgin Islands. Concurrent jurisdiction (law enforcement) is shared with the Government of the U.S. Virgin Islands. NPS concessioners must comply with applicable federal and territorial laws governing their operation.

## HOW BUCK ISLAND GOT ITS NAME

The first maps of St. Croix to name its off-lying cay and island date from the period of French ownership. Maps by Francois Blondel (1667) and Francois Lapointe (1671) both refer to what we now know as Green Cay as *Isle a Cabrits* (“Goat Island”) and Buck Island as *Isle Vert* (“Green Island”). *Isle Vert* was so called because it was originally forested with *lignum vitae* trees, which have very dark green leaves; from a distance, the island would have a dark green appearance.

In 1750, the first map of St. Croix under Danish ownership was drawn by two surveyors by the names of Jaegersborg and Cronenborg. *Isle Vert* was now called *Pocken-Eyland*, but the meaning was the same. Until the mid-1700s, German was the language of educated Danes. The German word for *lignum vitae* is *Pockholz*, so *Pocken-Eyland* literally meant “Lignum Vitae Island.”

Jens Mikkelsen Beck (1754) and Paul Kueffner (1767) printed early maps of St. Croix. Kueffner labeled the former *Isle a Cabrits* as *Gruenkey* (German for “Green Cay”), which has continued in its English form to this day; *Pocken-Eyland* became *Bockeneyland*. These changes may be explained as follows: It seems likely that the name of the cay and the name of the island were accidentally switched by the engraver. In the 1700s, maps and illustrations were printed from engraved copper plates. Everything was engraved in reverse (like a negative) so that it would print positive on the paper. One can see how mistakes could occasionally happen. The change from *Pocken-Eyland* to *Bockeneyland* simply involved changing the “P” to a “B.”

By the time of Kueffner’s map (1767), *Pocken-Eyland* had either been leased to or purchased by a Dane with the last name of Diedrich, who was the Town Clerk (recorder of deeds) at Christiansted, which was capital of the “Danish Islands in America.” Contrary to popular legend, Diedrich was not a pirate or a privateer, nor did he live on the island! He established a small settlement of slaves there to cut down the *lignum vitae* trees for export. This ecological disaster was made worse when goats were introduced to the island in the last quarter of the 1700s. It was the presence of goats that caused subsequent mapmakers to assume that the name *Bock* was the Dutch word for ram-goat, instead of a misspelling. It was a simple step to convert *Bock* to the English “Buck” in maps beginning in 1824. Place names on Buck Island, such as “West Beach,” “Turtle Bay,” and “Diedrich’s Point” were invented for the benefit of tourists within the last 40 years!

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